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BY THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL

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Report To The Congress

OF THE UNITED STATES

ORIGINAL

DOD's Unaccompanied Enlisted Personnel Housing--Better Living Conditions And Reduced Costs Possible

GAO reviewed unaccompanied enlisted personnel housing at nine installations and found that the military services were

--providing some accommodations which were below DOD's minimum standards of adequacy at seven installations,

--incurring unnecessary off-base housing costs,

--planning questionable housing projects at four installations, and

--modernizing facilities unnecessarily.

GAO believes that DOD can improve the overall living conditions of its unaccompanied enlisted personnel and reduce the cost of providing adequate housing. GAO makes recommendations to assist in achieving these objectives.

SUMMARY

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APRIL 30, 1982

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COMPTROLLER GENERAL'S
REPORT TO THE CONGRESS

DOD'S UNACCOMPANIED ENLISTED PERSONNEL HOUSING--BETTER LIVING CONDITIONS AND REDUCED COSTS POSSIBLE

D I G E S T

The Department of Defense (DOD) received about $1.1 billion in appropriations during the past five fiscal years to construct or modernize unaccompanied enlisted personnel housing (formerly bachelor enlisted quarters). Despite these sizable appropriations, DOD reported to the Congress in February 1981 that it had a personnel housing deficit of approximately 300,000 spaces.

In addition to spending sizable amounts for new construction and modernization of personnel housing, DOD pays millions of dollars each year to house unaccompanied personnel in non-Government quarters. In view of the large amounts DOD is spending on housing its unaccompanied enlisted personnel, GAO made this review to evaluate the military services'

--efforts to provide personnel adequate housing,

--efforts to control off-base housing costs,

--computations of personnel housing requirements, and

--personnel housing modernization policies, procedures, and practices. (See pp. 1 and 2.)

GAO found opportunities for the military services to more efficiently use existing unaccompanied enlisted personnel housing assets, more accurately determine housing deficits, and control modernization costs. In addition, GAO believes DOD can substantially reduce its off-base housing costs, as well as its construction and modernization costs, and provide better housing to its unaccompanied personnel. (See pp. 11, 22, 33, and 41.)

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PROBLEMS IN UNIFORMLY AND ADEQUATELY HOUSING PERSONNEL

DOD has established minimum standards of adequacy for housing unaccompanied enlisted personnel and criteria for constructing new facilities. These standards and criteria apply to the amount of space each person is to receive, the maximum number of persons to occupy a room, and the type of bath facilities to be provided.

The services have not uniformly adopted or implemented DOD's standards and criteria. As a result of this and the fact that DOD has a mixture of new and old housing for unaccompanied enlisted personnel, the accommodations a servicemember receives may vary widely within and among the services. (See pp. 4 to 8.)

Seven of the nine installations GAO visited provided servicemembers accommodations that were below DOD's minimum standards of adequacy. Although some installations simply lacked adequate housing facilities, other installations could have provided adequate accommodations through better management of their housing facilities. (See pp. 8 to 11.)

OFF-BASE HOUSING COSTS CAN BE REDUCED

Inefficient utilization of unaccompanied enlisted personnel housing facilities at seven of the nine installations resulted in unnecessary off-base housing costs. For example, Eglin Air Force Base followed a practice called "unit integrity" (i.e., blocks of space are assigned to organizational units and later the units assign personnel to the spaces). As a result of using unit integrity from April 1980 through March 1981, the base authorized personnel to live off base at a cost of $298,000 because their units' spaces were full even though other spaces were available on base.

DOD is attempting to improve personnel housing information for more efficient management by requiring the services to periodically report their housing inventory, occupancy, and utilization. However, GAO believes that the data DOD requested will not provide a complete or accurate picture of housing capabilities. (See pp. 13 to 19.)

GAO also believes that the services could further reduce off-base housing costs by

--requiring installations to use underutilized facilities at other nearby installations and

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--constructing new facilities before modernizing existing ones, when both types of projects are planned, to minimize the need to house personnel displaced during modernization off base.

In addition, in order to reduce off-base housing costs, GAO believes the Air Force should be required to lower its standards for certain personnel to DOD's minimum standards. (See pp. 19 to 22.)

REPORTED INACCURATE HOUSING DEFICITS CAUSING UNNECESSARY CONSTRUCTION

DOD has reported to the Congress that it has a requirement to construct or modernize approximately 300,000 spaces for unaccompanied enlisted personnel. However, the nine installations GAO visited overstated the number of personnel needing housing by 1,600, understated the capacity of existing adequate housing by 1,700 personnel, and reported another 3,200 adequate spaces as substandard. As a result, the nine installations' reported requirement to construct 6,500 housing spaces was overstated by about 102 percent. (See pp. 25 to 32.)

Additionally, the deficits were overstated because

--the Navy did not consider berthing barges as housing assets and

--underutilized facilities at a nearby installation were not considered. (See pp. 32 and 33.)

GAO believes that four construction projects could be either eliminated or reduced in scope at an estimated savings of $20 million. (See p. 33.)

POSSIBLE MODERNIZATION SAVINGS

The Army and Air Force are unnecessarily modernizing some facilities. In particular, the three Air Force bases GAO visited had projects to add private or semi-private bathrooms to existing facilities even though the facilities already met DOD minimum standards of adequacy. Additionally, the Air Force did not consider additional off-base housing costs in the project justifications. (See pp. 36 to 40.)

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RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

To improve the management of DOD's unaccompanied enlisted personnel housing program, the Secretary of Defense should:

--Revise DOD's inventory, occupancy, and utilization reporting requirements so that program managers receive accurate information and require the services to implement the reporting requirements in a timely manner. (See p. 23.)

--Redirect the services to uniformly adopt and implement DOD's minimum standards of adequacy for assigning personnel to existing adequate housing. In the case of the Air Force, it would mean lowering the standards for certain personnel to DOD's minimum standards, which would reduce off-base housing costs. (See p. 23.)

--Direct the services to thoroughly review the unaccompanied enlisted personnel housing deficits for currently programed, funded, and/or planned construction projects and cancel, where economical to do so, unneeded projects. (See p. 34.)

Additional recommendations to the Secretary are contained on pages 23, 34, and 41.

AGENCY COMMENTS

GAO discussed this report with DOD on February 8, 1982. By letter dated March 5, 1982, DOD generally agreed with most of GAO's recommendations and forwarded to the services a list of specific corrective actions they should take. (See app. IV.)

DOD did not agree with GAO's recommendations that (1) the Navy consider berthing barges as assets available to meet housing requirements (see p. 34) and (2) the Air Force not be authorized to add private or semiprivate bathrooms to facilities that already meet DOD's standards of adequacy (see p. 41). GAO continues to believe its recommendations are appropriate.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BAQ	basic allowance for quarters
DOD	Department of Defense
GAO	General Accounting Office
UEPH	unaccompanied enlisted personnel housing
VHA	variable housing allowance

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